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HELPING YOUR CHILD DEVELOP SECURITY

Definition: Security is freedom from fear, danger, and anxiety. (Winston)

I. Understanding the background of his behavior

A. What do we mean by behavior?

Terms often applied to behavior: good, bad, undesirable, impulsive, thoughtless, etc.

B. Can we differentiate between conscious and unconscious behavior?

C. Analyze some behavior situation.

Reading

Your Child's Emotions and His Behavior.

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Your Child's Emotions and His Behavior

Have you ever stopped to think about how you feel regarding the daily procession of life's situations that you meet or why you feel that way? Really our feelings are very important in our lives and in our daily activities. A better term for feeling is emotion. Last month, our discussion centered around particularly the matters of inheritance and immediate environment. Of course, our whole series as they go along are going to be concerned with these, taking specifically those things that fit into our problems of today. When we stop to consider our emotions and really define them, I am pretty sure that we will have a better understanding of ourselves as individuals living in a very complex world. Our problem of today is to fit ourselves into this world, which means that the world may be to some extent adjusted to us, but we in turn must make many adjustments ourselves, if we are going to find life good and satisfying.

Everything that you see, everything that you do, everything that others do, anything that occurs round about you, everything in this world that you notice at all brings forth within you some kind of a feeling and response. If the response is intense, you are conscious of it. If it is a slight response, perhaps you never realize that it has occurred. But on whatever the response depends is largely what you do. So I think we may safely say that our behavior is largely a product of our emotions. Of course, in the processes of growing up, you have learned that certain types of behavior are not acceptable, that certain things bring down condemnation from others, that certain things have been placed as against custom or propriety, that there are taboos placed upon some kinds of human behavior and therefore you make an effort to model your behavior according to the accepted plan. If that plan is satisfying to you, well and good. If it is not, I think you will have a consciousness of a real struggle, trying to do the kind of thing that society demands of you. Perhaps an illustration of this will help you see the meaning.

The best example I can give you is the one I have used again and again. Here is a woman who walks into her living room and sees a picture hanging crooked on the wall. She cannot sit down comfortably and sew or read or listen to the radio, or carry on a conversation until she has crossed the room and straightened the picture. She does not say to herself, "Oh, the picture is crooked, I must go and straighten it," but something seems to carry her right over there without this thinking process. What carries her is her feeling about the crookedness of the picture. If you watch your behavior in the course of the day, you will find that there are many things that you do not because you planned to do them but because you just did them. If you would go back into the analysis of why you just did them, it was because you felt like doing them. Since fortunately we are not all alike, I realize that there are some women who can see pictures crooked on the wall and know they are crooked and not be bothered enough by them to cross the room and straighten them. That is because their response to that particular situation is so mild that they are not pushed into action.

But let us take this first woman again in a different kind of situation. Suppose now she is calling on a friend and on her friend's living room wall there is a crooked picture. What will she do about it? In her own home, she would immediately jump up and straighten the picture before she could feel comfortable. But here because of her training and her experience, she knows that she may not get up and straighten her friend's picture. She must just endure it. So she makes an effort to meet the situation without too much discomfort. Watch her closely and see what really does happen. In the first place, it is hard for her to keep her attention upon the conversation. It takes some pretty juicy gossip to hold her. That means that occasionally she asks her friend to repeat something she has said. Her friend may wonder why she is so absent-minded. But I think we can understand. She is using a great deal of her mental energy trying not to notice the crooked picture. If you have ever tried not to look at something that disturbs you, I am pretty sure you understand how she feels, Now watch her closely a little bit longer and you will notice something else. She is very restless. She moves around in the chair frequently and if she has anything in her hands, she fiddles with it. Why all this motion? Simply because the crookedness of the picture gives her a desire for action and since she may not do the normal action, which would be to cross the room and straighten the picture, it translates itself into these other forms.

If we are going to get along in the world with other people, it is important that we understand them. In dealing with them and with your children day by day, this bit of knowledge should help you. Your child responds much more directly to the way he feels than you do, yourself, simply because his training and experience is much less than yours.

When I use that term "feeling," I, remember, am referring to emotions. The psychologist tells us that there are three primary emotions--anger, fear, and love--and that these can be observed in the baby very shortly after birth. I think we have all recognized these ourselves. The new-born baby shows his anger if any part of his body is much restricted. That is, if you hold too tightly or pull his legs out straight and hold them that way or hold his head very still, he will become red and let you know vocally that he disapproves of the situation. Every mother knows that by petting and stroking her baby, she can give him a sensation of pleasure and bring about evidence of happiness. This is the first evidence of that emotion which we call love. Then, perhaps you've all observed that when you are holding a baby, if there is a sudden jolt or change in support that the infant clutches with his hands and gasps. If the situation is intense, he cries. That again is one of the early emotions--the showing of fear.

But we are adults and through our emotional states developed from these primary emotions, they are now so complex and so involved and conditioned that it is hard for us to definitely analyze them. Still studying the child's emotions gives us a clew to our own.

It is much simpler to understand your child's emotional responses. In the first place, they depend upon his entire physical and nervous structure. To study your child's emotions, we must first consider his response type, then his response stability. These are very different in different individuals. Response type has to do with how quickly an experience brings response. Ask yourself, "How quickly does this child, when cause arises, become excited, frightened, pleased, disturbed, or angered?" Some people are very excitable, easily aroused; others, very slow, and it requires an intense situation to bring a response. But most of us are somewhere in between these extremes. Now regarding your child, the question is, How quickly or how slowly is the response in coming?

Suppose you draw a line, labeling one end fast, the other slow. At the center is zero. On this line check where you place your child. On which side of the zero does he belong? and how far to that side? If he is close to the fast end, I suggest that you avoid situations that are apt to be emotionally disturbing to him. If he is close to the slow end, he needs stimulating experiences.

Our second consideration must be his response stability. In other words, how long does his response last? When he is aroused--excited, angry, frightened, depressed--how long does he stay that way? Some folks' emotions are very fleeting. I am afraid they do not get much pleasure out of them. Life must seem very drab to them! Others remain aroused for a long time. Some of these are the folk who hold grudges. Again we might say the normal person is the one who may get excited, become very happy or greatly grieved but as soon as the cause of the situation is over, he passes back into his normal emotional balance.

What is the significance of this emotional type or stability? Just this: individuals who find it very hard to respond emotionally will find life rather drab, and if he is slow to respond and gets over it very quickly, then I am afraid he will find life so uninteresting that others will not enjoy him very much. That type of child needs to have more emotional experiences and we need to keep him stirred up a little bit when we get him started. Any person whose emotions do not hold on long enough for him to get some pleasure out of them finds life dull. Suppose you have a child, however, who is very easily upset, who gets angry quickly, who has his feelings hurt, who does get excited over little things, that child needs to be protected from intense emotional experience from excited play, from things that disturb him too greatly.

Let us consider just for a moment the person who remains depressed or angry or holds grudges or sulks after emotional upset. That person, of course, would be very hard to live with and I think when we notice that in our children, right away we should let them understand that that is not an acceptable type of response. A child who sulks should never have reward from his associates. They should show him no special attention. We should make an effort to withdraw from him so that he sees that his behavior is undesirable. Then when his behavior is satisfactory, he should have praise and reward. Many of life's most happy experiences come

from balanced emotional stability, and if we will watch our children very carefully, observing these things in them, I think we could do a great deal to give them some emotional training.

There has been much discussion among physiologists and psychologists regarding the biological purposes of emotions. I think we can see that anger causes a temporary increase in physical strain and endurance which helps in overcoming difficulty, that fear causes flight or withdrawal from danger, and that love causes the approach to the love object that leads to mating and reproduction. These things are necessary in the life program.

Let us now make a special study of anger, and that will give us a beginning grasp upon the other emotions. We will start with a little story.

Norman was building a garage with his new blocks when his mother asked him to run upstairs on an errand for her. She had to speak to him several times before he did as she asked. He did not go very cheerfully and when he came downstairs went out of doors leaving his blocks in the center of the living room floor. When his father saw them there he went to the door and called to Norman to come in immediately and put his blocks away. The boy refused to come and his father hurried out into the yard to get him. Norman tried to escape, but he was caught and his father shook him as he pulled the boy into the living room. Norman fought and struggled with his father who finally spanked him, and then stood over him as he picked up his blocks.

When we are considering any situation involving people we must always take into consideration each person's emotional response to that situation--how he feels and then why he feels that way. In this little family picture we have three persons involved. How does each one respond to the situation?

No doubt, the mother is somewhat annoyed that Norman does not jump to do her bidding. Aren't we all irritated when our desires are ignored? I am sure we can hear this mother's voice rising a tone or two each time she speaks to Norman.

The father's part in the picture is interesting. We may assume that father either stepped on or kicked one of those blocks as he came into the room. Would it annoy him? Can we see that annoyance expressed in his face when he goes to call Norman? Can Norman hear it in his father's voice? Norman doesn't come! Another annoyance! It is not hard for us to picture to ourselves the rise of emotion in this father. When the boy doesn't come, he hurries out after him. The boy runs from his father and he, a big man, must run after and capture this little child. When caught the child struggles against the man. The rather natural response follows. To completely understand this family picture we must consider carefully the physiological side of our emotions.

The psychologist gives us a very interesting explanation. He tells us that the baby is born with a capacity for emotions. He can become angry, he can be made happy, and become afraid. This is because when he is born, he is equipped with his senses, nerves, various glands, and some muscle structure. The working together of these structures produces his emotions.

Dr. Watson defines emotions as hereditary patterns that help the individual adjust himself to his environment. He inherits this pattern from some of his many ancestors. Therefore no two of us have identical patterns and we do not respond alike to the same situations.

Every experience brings some stimulation to this inherited pattern. The type of pattern we have--whether it is quick or slow to respond, stable or unstable--determines the effect of this stimulation. It translates itself in action.

This action is brought about through a series of body changes that occur so rapidly they seem almost instantaneous. We will follow these changes in Norman's father. He came into the living room in all probability in a state of normal emotional balance. But when he stepped on the block his emotional as well as his physical balance was disturbed. This disturbance becomes greater as the situation becomes more complex. He calls. The boy doesn't come. He goes out after him. The boy runs from him. He has to run after him. The boy tries to escape. He catches him and shakes him. The boy struggles to get away from his father. The final picture is of the boy being spanked and then the father standing over him while he picks up his blocks.

If we could watch this father closely, we would notice that when he stepped on the block his muscles began to tighten, he began to breathe more rapidly, and his heart began to beat faster, causing his skin to become flushed and hot. The irritations that followed increased these body responses. It all goes back to his emotional pattern--a part of his inherited make-up.

The impressions of the disturbing experiences were received by the senses, carried by the nervous system to the adrenal gland which immediately discharged its secretion into the blood stream. This secretion in the blood causes the muscles to become tense, causes the lungs to expand and contract more rapidly and speeds up the heart and the entire blood flow, forcing it from the interior of the body out into the muscles. No wonder this father's skin became flushed and hot. Another change occurred. This we cannot see in him but we do see the results of it. The liver becomes active and discharges into the blood a large amount of a substance called glycogen. This is the reserve energy material of the body--your emergency fuel pile. Like any fuel it must unite with oxygen to release its heat or energy. So here it is, lots of it, right alongside the oxygen that this father's more rapid breathing is pumping into his blood. If these two substances--glycogen and oxygen--unite, action must result--the running after the boy, the

shaking, the spanking. Have you ever gone out of a room and shut the door hard, and then felt better because you did? All of this is important in our understanding of emotions.

When we stop to consider anger, I think we all realize that it is aroused by anything that thwarts or obstructs the individual. It irritates you to have things interfere with you or to have things get in your way. It is no wonder that baby cries when you restrain the freedom of his body. Our particular problem is to condition your child's anger to the right kind of situations. Of course, he is going to get angry. We would not have him otherwise, but there are some situations where a child may become angry uselessly. As we get older and have more experience, we see more and more the futility of a lot of human emotion. We see it as a great waste in human effort and energy.

When I think of conditioning, immediately there comes to mind the easiest type--verbal conditioning. That is, we tell the child. We may say to a youngster, "All big boys don't get angry at objects that are too big for them to move. They ask someone to help." This type of conditioning may work in some instances. Certainly, it will not work unless the child has absolute confidence in the person making the remark.

I am not always sure that our children have this confidence in us. You know, we adults all talk too much. We say many little things carelessly and thoughtlessly, perhaps jokingly, and our children take them seriously. When I was a child, I was told that if I would eat my bread crusts, my hair would become curly. I would hate to tell you the number of bread crusts I ate and then one day I observed that my sister's hair was perfectly straight and she had been eating bread crusts much longer than I had. Right then I decided that these grown-ups didn't always know what they were talking about, and I was very wary for a long time to try out the things that they suggested. There was a time when we, as a family group with relatives, were eating sweet cherries out in the garden and one aunt remarked, "Children, be careful and don't swallow the seeds, or cherry trees will grow right out of your mouths." I swallowed seeds fast and furiously to see this thing come about. Oh, yes, today I understand. But then, I knew that somebody wasn't telling the truth. So I warn you parents watch yourselves a little bit. Check up on these things. If you are having a joke, let your child understand it's a joke.

When verbal conditioning isn't going to meet our situation, I think that environmental conditioning is perhaps the thing. This is to put satisfying elements into the anger situation so that it no longer is an anger situation but a pleasure one. Let me give you an example. Suppose here is a little boy, Paul, playing with his blocks on the living room floor and unfortunately has chosen to build his blockhouse right in the path of general traffic through the home. That means that someone rushing by knocks the building down and, naturally, it makes him angry. We must wait a moment until the storm expends itself and then perhaps we can sit down with Paul and say, "That was too bad to have your blockhouse destroyed, but say, wasn't it kind of funny when it fell?" "Let me show you," you

say, "Now, I'll build up a house and you knock it down and see how funny it is when it comes clattering down." So build up a little blockhouse and then let the child knock it down. That is funny to him. It's always funny to see someone else's blockhouse fall. But now, he must transfer that sense of humor to his own situation, so we say, "You build a little blockhouse and let me knock it down, and we'll see how funny it is when your blockhouse falls." So entering into the game, he builds up a little structure and you knock it down and you both laugh over the clatter of the thing and then I think you should say, "Well, blockhouses fall down and we just have to get as much fun out of it as we possibly can." Even your 4-year-old will appreciate that type of conversation.

Another element of environmental conditioning is putting into the child's behavior a habit response that is acceptable. In other words, we can help him find what to do when he is angry so that he is not a disturbing social being. This recognition of the child's need for action is the whole crux of training.